

Home Life on Early Ranches of Southwest Texas

CHAPTER IV

Orlinda Thallman Bandera County

AMONG the early pioneer families of Bandera county is that of Orlinda Thallman. His parents with their two older children came from Germany to Goliad in 1852. Later, they went to Castroville, then to Bandera in 1854, before the Polish Colony located there.

Orlinda Thallman was born the following year and was probably the first American child born in that county. Mrs. Samuel Adameitz, a member of the early Polish Colony, stated that it was her "first case" after coming from Poland. Then, as now, the country was scenic, but was a wilderness. Game was plentiful, as the country was new. Modern homes on well cultivated farms, and ranches on which great herds of blooded cattle graze, had not yet been developed. The great goat industry had hardly started. There were no churches, no schools.

Orlinda Thallman grew up there and knew all the best swimming holes and fishing places on the river and hunted game in the woods. He went to school to Professor Koenighain, a noted pioneer teacher of that section. During his boyhood days the Indians made frequent raids into Bandera county, stealing horses and killing people, but he never encountered them. One morning he went out to drive in the oxen which were grazing near Privilege Creek. After locating the bells he went to the farthest one to round them up. He was gone about half an hour, and, as he returned he found one of the oxen had been killed by Indians. He removed the bell from the neck of the dead ox and proceeded leisurely toward home. In a few hours word came that the Indians had stolen several horses near there.

While Mr. Thallman's father, Leimbreicht, spelled the family name "Thallmann," Orlinda, for reasons of his own changed the spelling to "Thallman."

When 20 years of age he married Mary E. Cole and they went to housekeeping on the ranch that was to be



Orlinda Thallman ranch home built in the '80's. Just over the fence are Mrs. Thallman, Mr. Thallman and their son, Aaron.

their home during the remainder of their lives.

They located the first preemption or homestead on Middle Verde Creek and were probably the first family to settle there. The house was a two room log cabin with a large hall between and a "lean to" shed room built across the back. This room, containing the fireplace, served as a kitchen, dining room and living room. In the other two rooms were home-made beds, roped across with strips of rawhide. As the family increased a trundle bed was added because it could be pushed under the larger bed during the day.

The nearest neighbors were Mr. and Mrs. George Lewis and a Mexican family.

The big struggle at that time was to make a living off the country. And every member of the family worked. If Mr. Thallman was detained in town at night Mrs. Thallman shut the older children up in the house while she carried her baby on her hip to the other side of the pasture, sometimes one and two miles distance to drive up the sheep in order that they might be protected from the wolves. The children left at home alone huddled together in constant fear of the Indians, although they never came. But they did make raids in the community. If Mr. Thallman knew he would be away from home several days, his neighbor, Mr. Lewis, would drive up the sheep and pen them for the night.

Both Mr. and Mrs. Thallman worked hard, as did other pioneer settlers. He enclosed the pasture and field with a fence made of native rock. The rock fences would not have turned the deer but the range was good so they did not bother. Wolves were the greatest menace.

He raised corn, sorghum cane and oats. Oats were harvested with a cradle or old fashioned scythe. Mrs. Thallman raised a garden, principally potatoes, cabbage and tomatoes. They raised peaches from seedlings. There was an abundance of wild plums and dewberries. Venison was the main meat. There was plenty of wild turkey and later they raised hogs.

While the original home place con-

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sisted of 160 acres, additional land had been leased from Andrew Mansfield in order to provide a larger grazing acreage. In the late "80's" Mr. Thallman bought 3,000 acres of the leased land from Mr. Andrew Mansfield, paying \$1.00 per acre. He had gradually built up his cattle business so that he was able to sell enough steers to pay cash for the place. He had also a herd of about 1,000 head of sheep and had good horses.

Before the purchase of the additional land a large house, one story and a half high had been built and is still standing. It contained one big room 20x30 used as a combination bedroom and living room and had a fireplace. There were two other small bed rooms, one for the daughter, Josephine, and the other to be used "for company." The boys, Dave, Jim, Orlinda, Henry and Aaron slept upstairs. Eva, the baby, slept in the room with her parents. The log room continued to serve as a kitchen for several years though they cooked on a stove instead of a fireplace.

The building of the house was a great event. The lumber was brought by wagons from San Antonio and the house was built by John P. Heinen. At first light was provided by placing strings in pans of tallow. Later brass lamps were added.

While Mr. Thallman directed his attention to his steadily increasing cattle and sheep industry and some farm operations, Mrs. Thallman was busy at home. Regardless of all the work to be done, Mr. and Mrs. Thallman were determined the children must have the educational advantages that opportunities afforded.

The two oldest children were sent to school one year to a one-room one-teacher school taught by Miss Sue Jenkins. Dave, Josephine and Jim rode horse back to Bandera and attended a private school taught by Mrs. Ellen Mansley and daughters, Misses Alice, Amy, Louie and Ada. They had been



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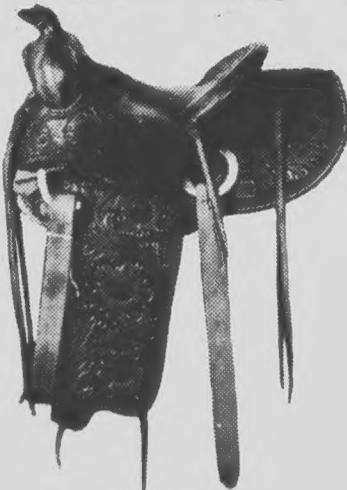
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well educated in England. Miss Louie was an accomplished musician and taught music.

During those days it was nearly impossible to secure the necessary help on the ranch. Later, Miss Amy Mandsley came to live on the ranch during the school term to teach the Thallman children. In time they continued their studies under Mr. Nagle, also an Englishman and who lived on the ranch. By this arrangement the children's education was not neglected and at the same time they could assist with the work.

Mrs. Thallman had no hired help. Josephine (now Mrs. Charles Eckhardt) had to get out of school early enough to help finish dinner and to wash the dishes. The boys took "time about" drying dishes. The older boy had to get out of school in time to drive in the sheep. The younger boys helped with the chores, feeding the stock, milking,



OLD SNATCHIT

The horse on which all the Thallman children learned to ride. Mrs. Charles Eckhardt says the wrinkles are those of old age and that this picture was taken shortly before "Old Snatchit" died.

and carrying in wood and water. All the water used at the house had to be carried from a spring across the creek and up a hill.

The children did everything that was to be done on the ranch. As Dave grew older he and a Mexican herded the sheep at lambing time. Josephine and the little boys took care of the ewes and lambs close to the house. As the children grew older Josephine was promoted to the corn dropping job and the little boys took over the care of the lambs. Thus the time of the Thallman children was devoted to study and to work in the home and on the ranch from September until March. At that time studies were dropped because every one was needed to help with the work in the field. Every child had his job to do, and did it.

Though the children worked hard, they had lots of fun. And sometimes the heartiest laughs were probably enjoyed all the more because they rarely got a joke on their father, and if they did, they did not dare say too much about it. He was very strict, but just, with the children. And one of the forbidden things was not to throw rocks at the sheep. Josephine and her little brothers had to herd them in each afternoon from the hillsides across the branches and put them into the pens where they would be safe for the night. The sheep liked to collect in low places. Frequent-

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ly, just as the children thought they had them ready to drive into the pens, one would run off in a ditch and the whole herd would disappear. Sometimes this would occur several times before they could be locked in securely for the night.

One day when Josephine was sick Mr. Thallman took her place. He broke a ewe's hip and a lamb's leg in a little while. "We laughed heartily," said Josephine (Mrs. Eckhardt) who related this story. "But it was so serious we did not let father hear us."

While Mr. Thallman directed the farming operations and ranch activities, Mrs. Thallman was busy with the cooking, scrubbing, washing, ironing, gardening and caring for the children. Peaches were bought by the wagon load and were dried and canned. Mrs. Laura Mansfield, Mr. Thallman's sister, canned and did other work.

Through all the work of rearing a large family, Mrs. Thallman managed to have some flowers blooming from early spring until frost. There were roses, altheas, verbenas, hollyhocks and old maids. They had to be irrigated during the dry summer months with water carried up from the creek. But she and the children felt that it was worth it.

Clothing and food that could not be raised were usually purchased at "the store" in Bandera. The big treat were store-bought cookies, loaf bread, sardines, chewing gum and candy. Mr. Thallman usually brought these to the children when he went to San Antonio to sell his wool. He also brought back food that had to be purchased in large quantities, such as barrels of sugar and materials for clothing that could not be secured at the local store.

One of the greatest joys of the year was when the father returned from San Antonio, the round trip requiring about six days. The family would sit around the fireside listening to his experiences. Thus they knew every place between Bandera and San Antonio by name before they ever made the trip. There were Geronimo Creek, Helotes, Cibola and Pipe Creek. Mrs. Thallman cooked a supply of food, usually, bread, bacon, cake and coffee to last the entire trip.

During the early years Mrs. Thallman did the sewing for the entire family by hand, but probably in the late '70's a Singer sewing machine was bought. Though it was crude it was a great help. She used it 50 years.

Mr. Thallman and Andy Mansfield were among the first to bring blooded Durhams from Pennsylvania to that county. Later they developed a herd of good horses and mules. They also bought a threshing machine with which they did custom threshing as far away as Center Point. They also got one among the first reapers.

The social activities were treasured all the more because they were rare. Mr. Thallman permitted his daughter, Josephine, to go to "play parties" but not to dances, except the square dances at her Uncle Andy Mansfield's.

"Uncle Andy called the dances with a deep bass voice," recalled Mrs. Eckhardt. "And he always had to have the Virginia Reel."

Christmas was always a happy occasion. The Orlando Thallman, Andy Mansfield and Herman Thallman families usually spent that time together. The women were busy all the week before, baking all kinds of cakes and pies, cooking meats and roasting wild tur-

keys. Very few gifts were given, but the cedar Christmas tree was colorfully decorated with strings of balls of popcorn, apples and animal cookies of various sizes. All the boys were provided with fire works. A delicious "spiced stew" was served before breakfast on Christmas morning. It was made of different spices — nutmeg, cinnamon, allspice and cloves, sweetened on which was poured boiling water. Whiskey was then added to suit the taste.

Another favorite Christmas dish was "hot egg-nog." This was made very much like any other egg-nog except boiling water was used instead of milk.

As the years passed and the Thallman's became more prosperous, new walnut furniture was bought as needed. And in 1904, six years before her death, Mrs. Thallman's dream of lifetime was realized when running water was installed in her home. She died in 1910, three years before her baby girl, Eva, graduated from C. I. A. That she instilled into her children a desire for the better things of life is reflected in the lives of each as a useful and upright citizen and in their home.

Mr. Thallman lived until 1922, on the ranch he had worked so hard to develop, enjoying the association of his

children and old friends with whom he had worked in developing better cattle, better sheep and better horses, he loved so well.

The children are Dave and Harry Thallman, China, Texas; Jim Thallman, Oxford, Florida; Aaron Thallman, Hondo, Texas; Orlando Thallman, Bandera, Texas; Josephine Thallman is Mrs. Charles Eckhardt and lives on the Eckhardt Ranch near Bandera; Miss Eva Thallman lives in New York City.

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